

## 20. WINTERING RANGE AND TIME EXTENSION OF HODGSON'S BUSH CHAT *SAXICOLA INSIGNIS* GRAY IN INDIA

(With one text-figure)

The Hodgson's bush chat *Saxicola insignis* Gray is a rare and little known winter visitor to India occurring mostly in the Gangetic plains of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, ranging from Ambala in the west to northern Bengal in the east. Also found in the Nepal *terai* and Sikkim foothills, it has not been recorded east of Jalpaiguri *duars* (which extends to 89° 50' E long.). *S. insignis* is reported to arrive in October and leave in March or early April for its breeding grounds in the mountains of Kazakhstan and Mongolia (Sálim Ali and S.D. Ripley, 1983 HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, Oxford University Press,

Mumbai).

During our stay at the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary 26° 40' to 26° 50' N lat. and 90° 50' to 91° 25' E long. in the Barpeta dist. of Assam, we saw this migratory bird every year between 1986 and 1989. A few of these birds were first seen in March 1986 at the Kasimdaha grasslands near Basbari. The collared bush chat *S. torquata* is the most common chat of these vast open grasslands dominated by *Saccharum narenga* and *Imperata cylindrica*, interspersed with tall elephant grass and very few trees, where we were studying the Bengal florican *Houbaropsis*

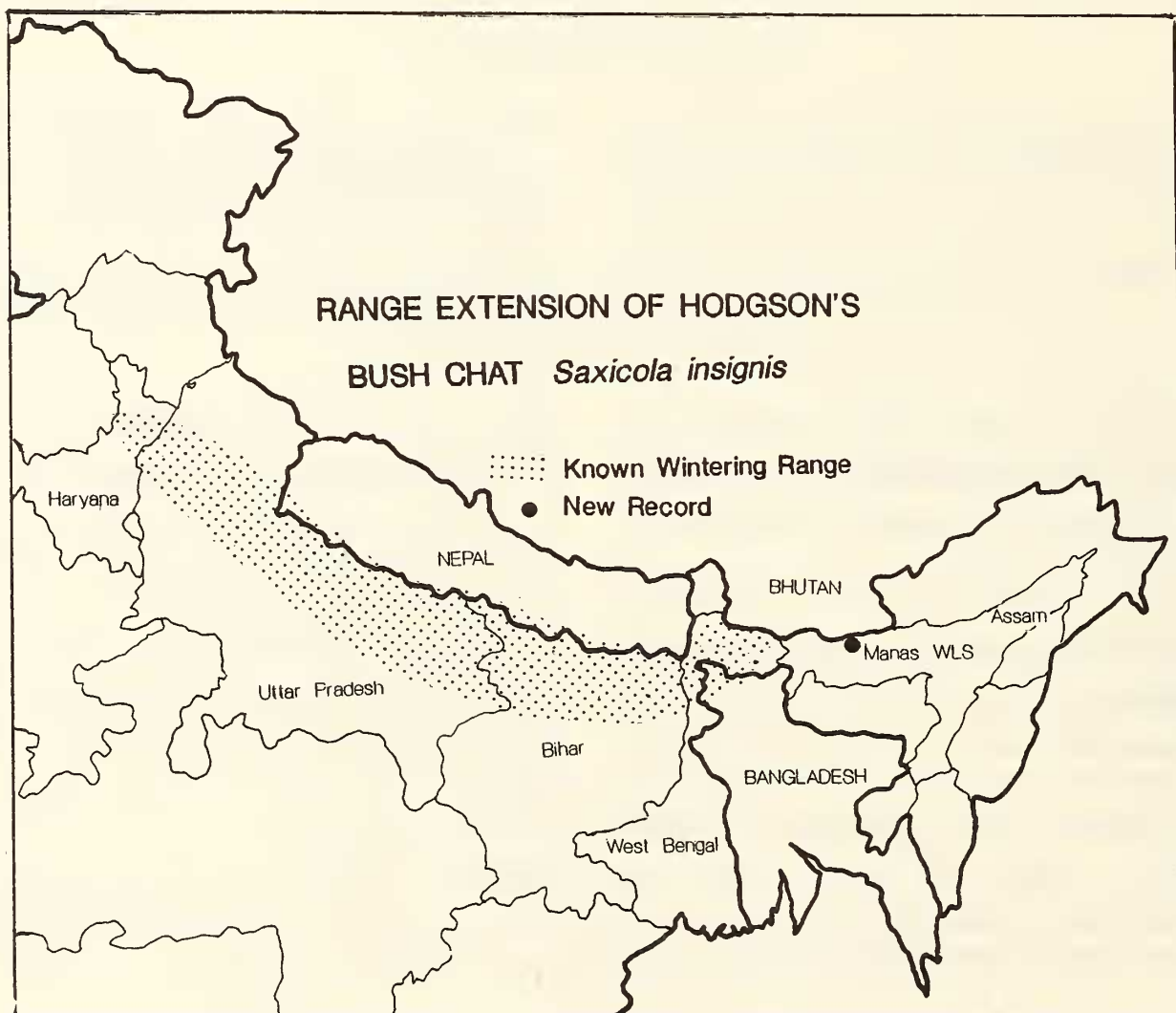


Fig. 1. Range extension of Hodgson's bush chat *Saxicola insignis*

*bengalensis*. This is the first record of *S. insignis* for northeastern India and the state of Assam.

*S. insignis*, though similar in appearance to *S. torquata*, can be distinguished from the latter by its bigger size, larger white wing-patch and white throat *contra* black; in the males the black of the head tapers to a very thin black line on the nape in *insignis*, whereas the whole breadth of the nape in *torquata* is black. With a little practice we were able to tell even the females of the two species apart. They kept singly or in loose pairs, perching on the top of low (*c.* 75 - 150 cm) grass or shrubs and often going to the ground to feed. The same patch of grassland was occupied by them for days and they defended these small territories by chasing away any intruding *torquata*. Photographs of these birds were taken.

In 1986, the last bird was seen on 24th April, which is a wintering time extension for *S. insignis* in India as Ali and Ripley (1982) have recorded 10th April as the previous last date. In 1987, the first bird was seen on 28th February in the same area and they remained there till the fourth week of April. However, in 1988, we did

not see the birds in that area till the third week of April when a few were also seen in similar grasslands at Kapurpora on the Manas river. In 1989 too, they were first sighted in April and disappeared within a couple of weeks. Since the bird is quite rare, it is possible that we could have missed some individuals wintering in areas not frequented by us in the last two seasons.

Our sightings indicate that *S. insignis* are passage migrants through Manas Wildlife Sanctuary on their way back to the breeding grounds. Unlike *S. torquata*, they do not appear here in September-October. However, a few individuals stay in Manas between end February and April during the spring migration.

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## 21. HERPETOFAUNA OF PHULWARI KI NAL WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, RAJASTHAN STATE

Phulwari Ki Nal Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in Udaipur district at the southernmost end of the state. The flora of the sanctuary is mainly deciduous. Phulwari ki Nal is among the lesser known sanctuaries of India, but it is rich in floral and faunal diversity. Except for Sharma (1995), we have little knowledge about the herpetofauna of this sanctuary. McCann (1946) has recorded nearly 17 reptilian species from Mt. Abu, Phulwari ki Nal. In the present paper, the reptiles seen from 1986 to August 1995 in this sanctuary are listed below:

Family: CROCODYLIDAE

(1) *Crocodylus palustris* Lesson: Once very common in the Mansi-Wakal river, the main and principal river of the sanctuary, now rare.

During rainy season, it sometimes becomes visible in the receding water. At present their nearest known habitat is Jhadol Dam. Perhaps they also breed there. I saw three in and around the sanctuary area from July 1993 to July 1995.

Family: EMYDIDAE

(2) *Kachuga tecta* (Gray): Seen in the Mansi-Wakal river. Very common in lakes of the district. It likes to sit on emergent outcrops specially during winter.

Family TRIONYCHIDAE

(3) *Lissemys punctata* Lacepede: Uncommon, seen in wells and ponds. Flesh is consumed by tribals for treatment of tuberculosis.